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ABSTRACT

A model was developed out of a need to help women move toward a more authentic existence. It was intended to help women go beyond the level of awareness in their present quest for self-determination, to make full use of their lives, to challenge their capabilities, and to reach for new horizons. The model involves both an unlearning and a relearning. While it suggests a smooth sequential ordering of events, it also recognizes and allows for the fact that change does not usually happen in an orderly fashion. The model has four core phases and two extra phases. The four phases of the core model are as follows: "Setting the Climate," "The Way I See Myself and Others," "The Way Change Occurs in Me and Others," and "Where Do I Go From Here? The two extra phases that form the complete model are "Case Study" and "What Have I Done, Am Doing, and Hope to Do?" After being used in women's groups, the model was revised to put more emphasis on action, rather than simply on awareness. This was accomplished by expanding the second phase--"The Way I See Myself and Others"--to include an examination of why conditions are that way. For example, women are encouraged not only to see themselves as oppressed and society as oppressors but also to examine why this is so and to move beyond it. It is hoped that this model will facilitate women's efforts to take the concepts of equality, respect, love, and trust out of the realm of abstract ideals and make them more a part of the daily exchange with each other and those outside their immediate environment. Women moving women beyond the level of awareness is a powerful reality. (KC)

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WOMEN MOVING WOMEN: GOING BEYOND THE AWARENESS STAGE

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WOMEN MOVING WOMEN: BEYOND AWARENESS

This paper grew out of my attempt to understand the process of change in women and the barriers that hinder and the factors that facilitate the change process.

I began this search with a modest effort -- a workshop for leaders of women's groups -- and because the subject stimulated a great deal of interest and turned out to be a fascinating and exceedingly interesting subject, I continued my investigation of the topic. My endeavor still continues to be modest because I have deliberately kept to the level of practice -- improving the workshop format -- though I must admit being drawn to the theoretical as a result of my investigation of the phenomenon and my readings on the subject.

It is the purpose of this paper to describe a model developed out of a need to help women move toward a more authentic existence. Put briefly, women moving women is a powerful reality. Helping women to go beyond the level of awareness in their present quest for self-determination, to make full use of their lives, to challenge their capabilities and

versatility, to reach for new horizons and to develop interests and hobbies that permit the setting aside of tensions and concerns is a laudable goal. Thus, my intention in this paper is threefold: to describe my original model and to point out its limitations, to give an account of the revision process, and finally to present the revised model along with suggestions for making it work.

A PROCESS MODEL

This model developed out of a need to help women move toward a more authentic existence. It is two dimensional in form based on the belief that, the process of becoming critically aware of the need to change the way we see ourselves and others, and the change/transformational process itself, both must be seen as interdependent functions, and be understood as the necessary shadow side of appropriating a newer perspective of moving toward something considered better.

The process involves both an unlearning and a relearning, two steps which are seen to be both separate yet intertwined. The model which is based on phases is intended to be flexible and easily adaptable to particular situations. While it suggests a smooth sequential ordering of events, it also recognizes and allows for the fact that change does not usually

happen in an orderly fashion.

THE MODEL: The complete model (see Figure 1) consists of six phases and a core model of four. The core model consists of those phases that are considered essential to the process; the complete model includes the core and those other phases which are considered important, although not essential, depending in large part on the objectives and intentions of the users, the needs of the target audience, and the time alloted for the task.

The four phases of the core model are as follows:

PHASE I: Setting the Climate

PHASE II: The Way I See Myself & Others

PHASE III: The Way Change Occurs in Me and Others

PHASE V: Where Do I Go From Here?

The two extra phases that form the complete model are:

PHASE IV: Case Study

PHASE VI: What Have I Done? Am Doing? Hope to Do?

PHASE I: SETTING THE CLIMATE

This phase takes place in a large group session and involves a brain-storming. The participants are asked to name general attitudes about women, both

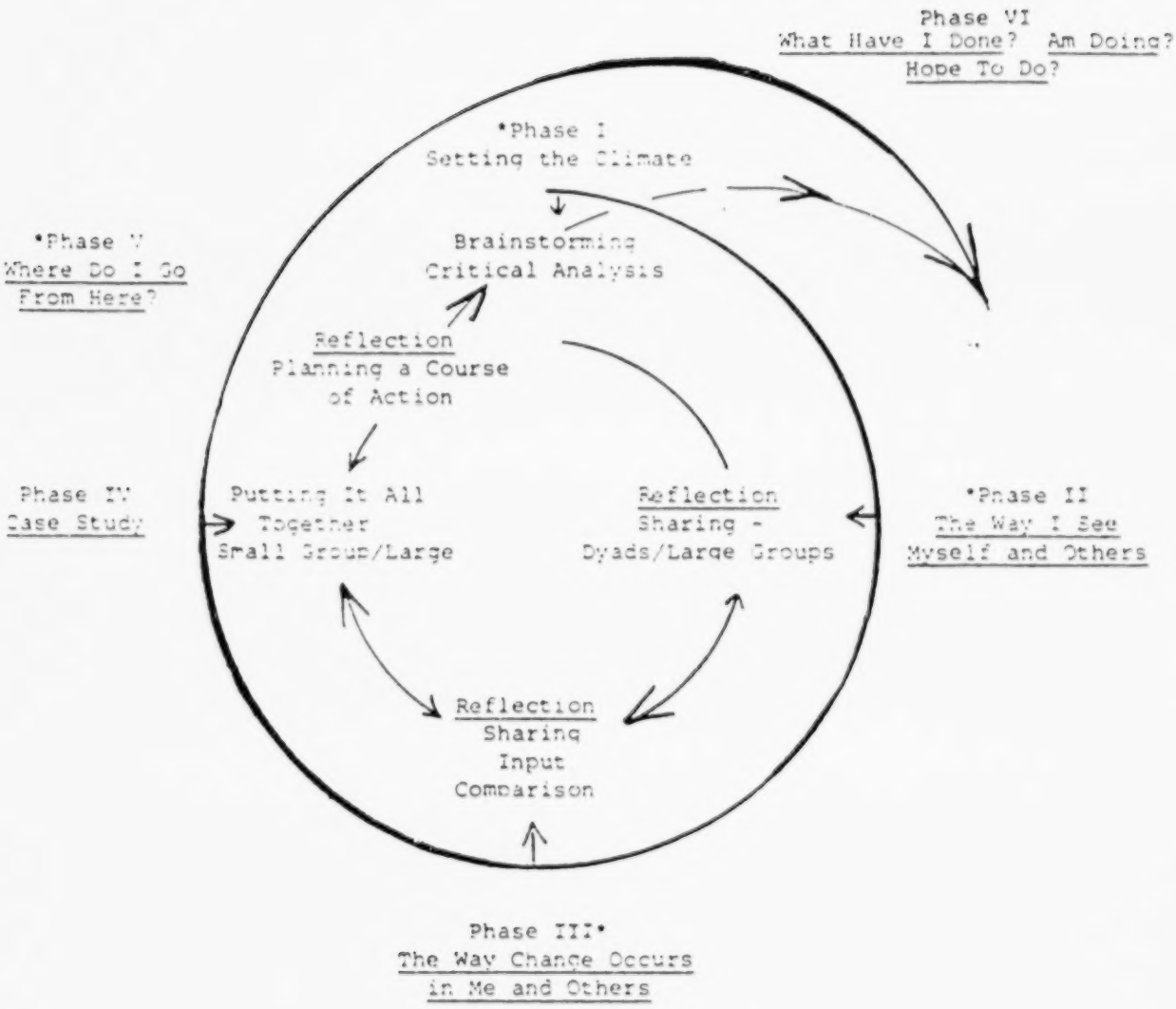

Figure 1. A process model. Outer circle represents the phases of the program, inner circle represents the process of the program, the integration of the two circles is the point of authentic existence, the two-way arrows represent flexibility in the process - the freedom to move ahead or go back.

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their own and those of others. The participants are asked to make judgments, positive or negative, about these attitudes which are then recorded on charts.

The task of coming to grips with these judgments is a good climate-setting exercise. Such attitudes as selfish, money-grabbing, sex objects, are not difficult to label as negative; either are the attitudes like kind, generous, or loving, difficult to list as positive; but such attitudes as emotional, aggressive, demanding, become more difficult to categorize as either/or. The participants find themselves becoming critically aware of these words, the attitudes they convey, and what these attitudes really mean. By relating these attitudes to particular situations, these words begin to take on different meanings; e.g., the word "demanding" might be judged as negative, if it refers to getting more than one deserves. On the other hand, it might be considered a very positive attitude if it refers to an issue like demanding equal pay for equal work.

PHASE II: THE WAY I SEE MYSELF & OTHERS

This phase follows logically from the brainstorming exercise. The participants are given a paper and are asked to reflect on the following three questions:

1. What are some of your present attitudes toward

women?

2. Identify all the influences in your life that helped form these attitudes?

3. What has been your most important positive influence?

The purpose of this exercise is to get the participants to reflect on present attitudes toward women and then to identify those factors/events/people in their lives that influenced the present vision they now hold.

Participants then form dyads. They take time to share and discuss their reflections and to identify common influences in their lives that helped facilitate a positive attitude toward women. Then, in light of their own experience and their knowledge of other women, they are asked to look at the shadow-side of women's existence and to identify those chains - people, events, other influences, etc. - that perpetuate negative attitudes in women which keep them stuck in the past. These observations/ideas are then shared in a large group.

The introduction of the terms, shadow-side and chains, implies the need to free women from some kind of bondage, the need to help them affect change in themselves and others.

PHASE III: THE WAY CHANGE OCCURS IN ME AND OTHERS

The purpose of this phase is to identify steps/events in the change process. The participants begin with a reflective exercise. They are asked to select one change situation in which they were personally involved, e.g., marriage, job transfer, weight-watchers; to make a list of all the steps they took during this change process; and, to arrange these steps in chronological sequence. Following this exercise, they were asked to compare these findings in small groups. The large group is then assembled for a lecture and the dynamics of perspective transformation (Mezirow, 1981) are presented. Participants are encouraged to compare their findings with the information presented. This exercise is followed by a general discussion of the dynamics of change.

PHASE IV: THE CASE STUDY

A case study is usually a powerful tool because it allows the participants to deal with important issues as outsiders thus removing the threatening aspect of being too personally involved. Since it allows the person to relate to a situation with a rational frame of mind, it is an appropriate instrument for this type of process.

The objective of this phase is to create an environment in which much of the information already

presented in the first phases is brought together with the intention of highlighting issues, seeking and suggesting solutions.

The content of the case study needs to be directed to the requirements of the particular group. It might be written by the program planners, a team from the workshop group, or it might be taken from material already prepared. Short stories, newspaper and magazine features, films and film strips are also good sources of case study material.

The case study takes place in small groups. Issues are raised; solutions are suggested. The sharing of this information takes place in a large group. This can be done in creative ways using role play, drawings, and panels.

PHASE V: WHERE DO I GO FROM HERE?

This phase involves a reflection period. "What is the most essential thing for me to do?" is the important question. Participants are encouraged to start personal journals. If appropriate, participants might share ideas in small groups. They should leave the workshop with some plan of action. This might take the form of an objective and a task analysis. It might involve a plan for more personal reflection on the topic; selected readings might be recommended; or a group action might be initiated.

PHASE VI: WHAT HAVE I DONE? AM DOING? HOPE TO DO?

After a three/six month period, participants can either meet again or be contacted by mail. They are asked to reflect on their actions over the past three/six months, to evaluate what they have done, and to make some future plans. Opportunity for sharing should be provided. If the follow-up is done by a meeting, this could take the form of small groups; if by mail, the sharing could take place by means of a newsletter. The development of a network system might also be suggested as a way to keep the process going.

The learning journey continues, hopefully, with a transformed perspective.

THE LIMITATIONS OF THE ORIGINAL MODEL

Simply stated, the problem with the original model was getting women to go beyond awareness and take some action. While women sat at workshop sessions and shook their heads and voiced agreement with what was being said and discussed and even fantasized about how they might embark on a change path when it came time either to draw up a plan of action or to put a plan into action, they seemed to freeze. Quite obviously, they were not able to go beyond the level of awareness.

While I experienced this problem to a small

degree in my own work, a number of people who worked with the model brought this enigma to my attention. The call for action seemed to precipitate a state of dissonance between the espoused beliefs of the women, the need to change, and their theory in action, their inability to either plan or carry out a plan. How to move women beyond the level of awareness became the challenge.

The ideas that are presented in the next section are the result of many hours of mind-stretching and insightful discussion and argument with many people who contributed to my thinking about improving the model.

RATIONALE FOR THE REVISIONS

To Sheila M. Rothman (1978), a writer of women's history, the understanding of the experiences of women "requires a full appreciation of the interaction between opportunity and obligation, between social reality and ideology" (p. 14). This statement explained for me, at least in part, the dilemma experienced by a number of workshop leaders with the model. Could it be that these women were caught in a lop-sided view of their own situation? While the model encouraged them to critically reflect on their own position and to learn about and understand the body of ideas characteristic of feminist thinkers, it

did not provide them with the opportunity to take a realistic look at their social environment. In other words, they were looking through the glasses of the oppressed and what they needed were bi-focals in order to view at the same time the stance of the oppressor. Without this other viewpoint, in my opinion, women find themselves making plans in the dark and for that reason are reluctant to do so and if they do, are afraid of putting their plans into action because they are not sure of the risks.

It became apparent to me through my personal relection and discussions with others that women needed to create new conceptions of what it means to be a person in a total society rather than in the world of women if they were to change the day-to-day workings of their lives. In order for this shift to happen, the way women see themselves and others has to be approached from a more inclusive viewpoint. According to Miller (1976), "a valid understanding of the forces at work for all women ought to lead us to an understanding of the nodal points for change and advance (p. ix).

What the women lacked and that which the model did not provide was a complete view of the world. In other words, the women's lack of information about their total reality served as a barrier to change. Therefore, what was needed was more information, a

conclusion which concurs with Cross (1981) who believes that accurate information is an important link in the chain of responses that motivate people to take action. Prompted by this insight, I set about the task of conceptualizing this double viewpoint or what Miller (1976) calls "looking in both directions" (p. 27). To aid me with this undertaking I began to use the term oppressed and oppressors as a way of defining this double-vision that I was attempting to describe. Oppressed was a general term used for all women who were perceived as not reaching their potential and oppressors was used in terms of social or political situations that kept this process from happening. While these two words signify a polarity, they are really not an either or because both views are important when a person begins to investigate the way they see themselves and others. Mezirow (1981) labels this educational approach as social interaction and stresses that the intention of such a method is "helping learners interpret the way they and others with whom they are involved construct meanings, ways they typify and label others and what they do and say as we (the facilitators/workshop leaders) interact with them" (p. 18).

The View of the Oppressed

From this vantage point women could begin to

look at things in terms of being oppressed as outlined in Phase II of the Process Model. They then can analyze the social reality that leads to suspicions about their own situation. This view can serve to point out how and to what degree something exists or happens. In other words, it supplies the person with a rationale or the fundamental body of reasons serving to account for the way they see themselves and others. Thus, they are able to grasp and to understand the meaning of the real situation and in so doing are able to see our society and our world differently because they now have a better perspective for looking at the world. However, this new perspective is not going to lead to any worthwhile action because it represents only one part of the oppressed/oppressor polarity.

The Oppressors

From this vantage point women could begin to look at things in terms of the oppressors whether these be social or political situations such as people, the male members of society; places, a home environment where a women is forced to take on a double workload of provider and housekeeper, or employment where double standards are at play which result in discrimination practices. What the person looks for in these situations is the causes and reasons that brought these situations about and the ways this

discriminatory practice is put into operation. For example, instead of asking how women are treated as sex objects, or why some women bring home the bacon and fry it, too, or how some companies discriminate against women, ask why men, their families, and companies treat them this way. It is by searching out these causes that meaning will emerge. Meaning is like light; it must fall on something in order to be seen, in this case it falls on the oppressors. By allowing our reflections and discussions to concentrate on the oppressors a true meaning comes to light. In other words, women begin looking at the same situation from a different viewpoint than their own; the oppressed then begin to gain some knowledge and understanding about the oppressors.

The Combination of the Two Views

Once these two views have been examined separately, then it is time for them to be investigated as a whole. Learning on this level is what Mezirow (1981) calls perspective transformation. He tells us:

> Here the emphasis is on helping the learner identify real problems involving reified power relationships rooted in institutionalized ideologies which one has internalized in one's psychological history. Learners must

> consequently be led to an understanding of the reasons imbedded in these internalized cultural myths and concomitant feelings which account for their felt needs and wants as well as the way they see themselves and their relations. Having gained this understanding, learners must be given access to alternative meaning perspectives for interpreting this reality so that critique of these psycho-cultural assumptions is possible (p.18).

In this way, self-determination is not found in the content of women's lives but rather in the process of learning how to learn (Smith, 1982). This concept becomes operative when there is an effort placed on personalizing what is learned by applying insights to one's own life or works as opposed to mere intellectualization. Women need to break through to a new vision if they are to keep on living. This very personal kind of creativity, this making of a new vision, this continuous struggle, does not usually go on in open and well articulated ways, but it goes on in the process of perspective transformation. Today we can see this process most clearly in operation in women. They are the people struggling to create for themselves a new concept of personhood; they are attempting to reconstruct the central tenets of their lives. This effort extends to the deepest inner

reaches of the individual where meaning and purpose unite and give birth to a new understanding.

THE REVISED MODEL

The six phases in the first model, (see Figure 2) were all considered equal but in the revised model, Phase II -- called, the Way I See Myself and Others -- takes on the key role and permeates all the rest. This change is depicted in the new model (see Figure 2) by a Phase II box intersecting the circle and then being joined by a line to all the other phases. This continuous line forms another box which represents the degree to which the ideas and information in Phase II permeates the whole model.

Phase II will be conducted according to the original directions except that the shadow-side of women's existence will be given greater emphasis. For example, if a women feels she is being oppressed by her employer, she will be encouraged to seek out reason for the oppression. Why does her employer have such negative attitudes toward women? Is it because of cultural background, past experience, or simply greed. Perhaps it might be a combination of all three reasons or even some others. If so, how can she then deal with these obstacles. To suggest just one way when she names the obstacles -- in this case her employers negative attitudes -- she can begin to think

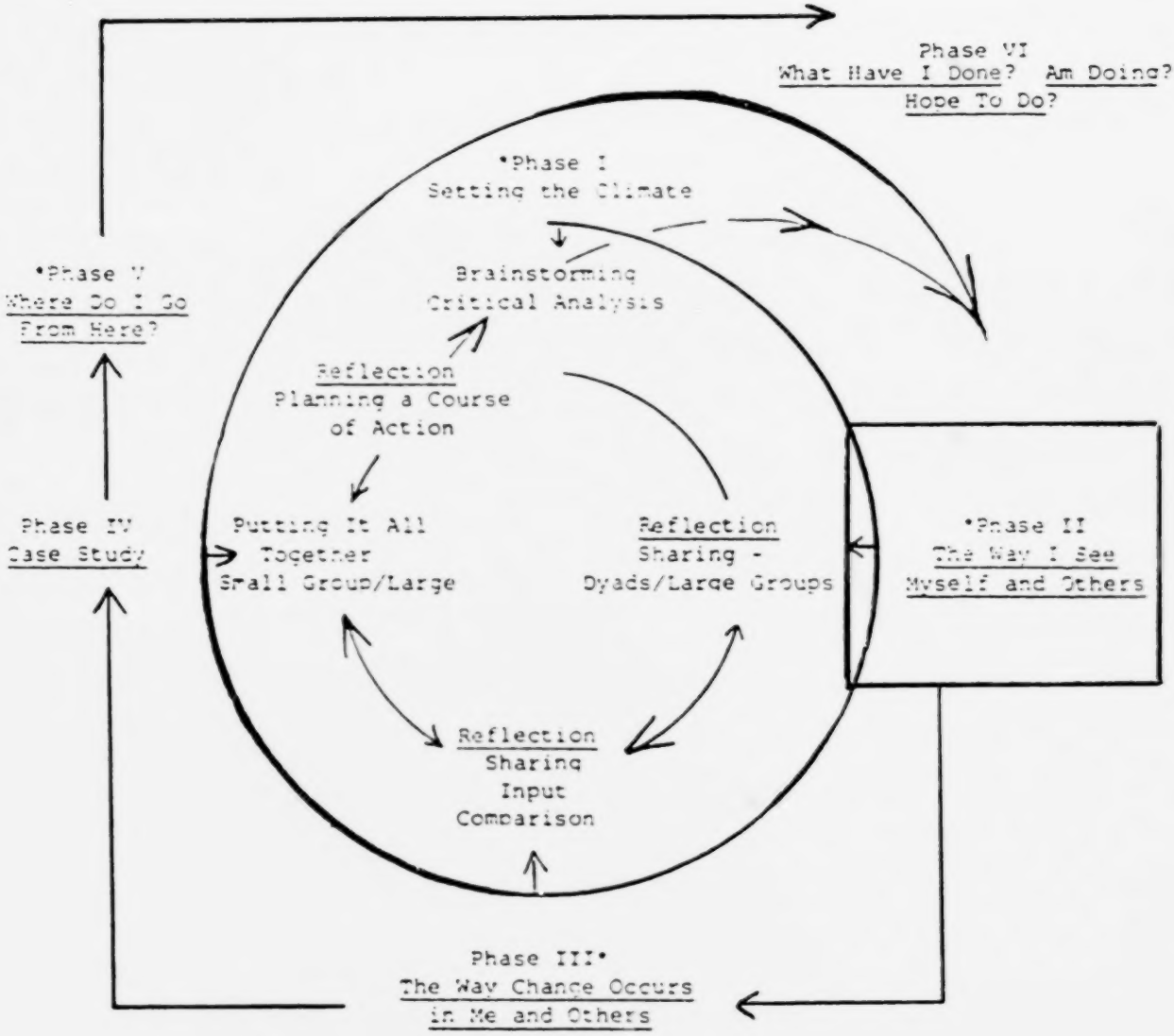

Figure 2. The revised model.

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of these in terms of her employer's weaknesses rather than her obstacles thus making her employer vulnerable in her eyes while in the past she was the vulnerable one. This change in view might find a new definition for her own strength so that when she comes to Phase V, planning action, or Phase VI, taking action, she can proceed with greater confidence.

HOW THIS PROCESS MIGHT BE FACILITATED

Social Support

Since there is a clear relationship between perceived social support and effective adjustment in a variety of stressful events, women should be encouraged to become part of a support group. Here, in this environment support can take many forms ranging from esteem and respect, encouragement, the provision of material aid to the providing of important information. Social support systems provide a climate in which self-identity changes can more readily occur.

The Opportunity for Free Expression

Those who are confronted with making a change may wish to talk about their experience with others. This desire may reflect not only a desire to obtain support, but also a desire to express one's feelings

and concerns, and to receive feedback that those feelings are understood by others and are appropriate under the circumstances. For this purpose the formation of a learning partnership might be appropriate (Robinson, Saberton, Griffin, 1985). As defined by these authors: "A learning partnership is a peer relationship between two people for whom the main objective is learning -- "learning" being defined as change affecting knowledge, attitudes, behavior, or understanding" (p. 1).

The Positive Power of Reflection

Women should be encouraged to explore opportunities for reflection. These might include learning to keep a journal, finding other people with whom they could share reflection, or structuring time for reflection by themselves on a regular basis. This latter might include a scheduled physical activity, such as jogging, walking or swimming, followed by a period of reflection (Boyd, 1980).

The importance of the reflective ability is strongly supported in the literature on experiential learning. Kolb and Fry (1975) point out in their theory that learning is concerned with a four-stage cycle which includes four abilities, one of these being reflective observation: "The experiential

learning model depicts learning as a process of conflict, confrontation, and resolution among four basic adaptive modes or ways of relating to the world: Concrete Experience vs. Abstract Conceptualization, and Active Experimentation vs. Reflective Observation" (p.37).

Since there is evidence that learning, change, and growth are best facilitated by an intergrated process that includes all four abilities, reflection should be encouraged. This ability is very often neglected in an action-oriented society because it takes time and is often perceived as an exercise that inhibits progress.

Not only could women learn to value and strengthen the reflective process in their lives, but they could learn to encourage and support the value of reflection in the lives of the people they instruct, guide, or counsel. Reflective learning is the key element in learning from experience (Boyd & Fales, 1983). According to these authors: "The process of reflection is the core difference between whether a person repeats the same experience several times, becoming highly proficient at one behavior, or learns from experience in such a way that he or she is cognitively or affectively changed. Such a change

involves essentially changing his or her meaning structures" (p.100).

CONCLUSION

At the present time, there appears to be a conscious search on the part of women to take the concepts of equality, respect, love, and trust out of the realm of abstract ideals and make them more a part of the daily ordinary exchange with each other and those outside their immediate environment. There seems to be a realization on their part that these forms of nurture can serve as powerful, emotionally fulfilling connectors between women whose lives are based on a shared vision. Women moving women beyond the level of awareness is a powerful reality.

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